

## MAIDENS, MIRTH AND MELODY DOMINATE THE THEATER

Survey of Season's Plays  
Shows Change for BetterIndications Point to Elimination of Trashy  
Drama of World War Period.

By EARLE DORSEY.

Odd though it may appear, there are certain unmistakable signs that the tone and quality of dramatic writing and acting shows improvement as the season moves toward the coming year. For example, an examination of the offerings in Washington theaters for the past three months reveals a rising percentage of acceptable stage offerings.

Examining new plays, both musical and dramatic, shows here in September, October and thus far in November, one discovers that only one of the seven strictly new plays revealed here in September could be properly classified as meretricious. The October percentage, on the other hand, rose considerably. During last month, eleven new plays, musical and otherwise, were offered in Washington, and of the seven, five qualified with interest. So far this month, not including the plays of this week, seven new productions have been offered and the month, however, is not over and it is probable that the November average of good plays will exceed even that of October.

September brought to Washington five new dramatic offerings and two musical plays. They were Knobel's "One," Guy Bolton's "Wild Cherry," Octavus Roy Cohen's "Come Seven," Evelyn Nesbit in "The Open Book," Rachel Barton Butler's "Mom," Mitzel in "Lady Billy" and Cort's musical show, "Jim Jam Jams."

This list, of course, does not include holdovers like "Beyond the Horizon," "Martini," or "Up in Mabel's Room." The pieces mentioned are all 1920 models.

Mitzel scored heavily in "Lady Billy"—a very charming contribution to the season's music stage—but notwithstanding the fact that Bolton's production of "Wild Cherry" is still running in Manhattan, it is a play that reflects little credit upon either producer, author or star. "Come Seven," of course, was an out-and-out "front," and "The Open Book" was a schoolgirl's flash in the pan. To Mitzel, then, goes the credit for having September's one and only meretricious piece.

**Improvement in October.**

Looking closely at the October card, one finds four good dramas out of seven and one good musical show out of four. "Daddy Dumps," "The Champion," "The Prince and the Pauper" and "The Acquittal" proved interesting if not classic, but Shipman's "Undesirable Friends," Anspacher's "Stepping Stones," and the Kruger-Hemmings opus "Sons of the Desert" failed to race within the betting. On the musical side, "Here and There" proved the only respectable piece of the four that displayed wit, wit, and the fate of "Buddies," "Sonny" and "Princess Virtue" has ceased to become a matter of interest.

Aside from the favorite statistical average of the October plays, one is pleased to note that a stern and earnest intention is reflected in the new plays of that month. Shipman's "Undesirable Friends" proved undesirable but the fault was not in intention. Shipman's theme was hardly trifling. "Stepping Stones," the Anspacher failure, was a finely mounted, accurately interpreted presentation of the story of one man's rise to higher things on stepping stones of other men's dead selves. The theme, however, was too academic and its treatment without sufficient warmth or sympathy to insure success. "Sonny," which also fell short, seemed a bit shallow in finished form though there were symptoms that the dramatic stroke, which is encouraging.

Peering into the November list, one finds the miserable flaccid of "The Dauntless Three" offset by the earnest novelty of the theater, "The Young Visitors." The Dauntless Three discontinued its run here, so all's well in that regard. "The Ruined Lady," a none too sincere thing at best, was discounted by the wrong side of the ledger. "The Young Visitors," however, both good and bad, of November, reflect a creditable sincerity, a commendable trend toward better workmanship,

better writing, better acting, better production that has been the wont of plays in the past two years. Miss Grace George very sincerely wants a good play and so does Otis Skinner. Neither can be accused of attempting a run for movie purposes only.

A mathematical plunge of this sort leaves one with certain definite findings on which conclusions may be based. It is clear that the tone of the drama is on the up grade. Perhaps it is ridiculously optimistic to assume that the upward movement will continue, but nevertheless, one may assume it for the simple reason that the theater invariably plays down or up to its public and it is hardly in the nature of things for public taste in this country to go any further down the scale.

In fact, indications that point to an improvement in the quality of theater commodities are indications more basic than a three-month survey of road-town conditions. The theater, in other ways, seems to betray a certain disgust at its own shoddiness. Long before this disgust became manifest in the theater, it was manifest in a growing proportion of the people who attend theaters.

Producers are business men, for the most part, and it has become steadily clearer that many of the dramatic hashes and stews previously prepared for an uncritical public have lately been repudiated by that same public. One producer of cheap farce is credited with a loss of nearly \$250,000 in the past year. His output of this type of stuff has signs of drying up entirely.

It being rather clear that the theater has reached low-water mark in the quality of its drama, it is only natural that the drama, always the theater's backbone, should be repudiated, should take an upward trend. Rather a large number of dramatic purveyors claim to have undergone a change of heart and to have seen demand for a better order of drama.

There is a certain grim humor in the situation. It is the reputation by a certain class of theater patron of the shoddy and mush that was esteemed so fondly a year or two ago. It is the growing education of a new theater and the enormous wages bred of the war.

**The Theater-Going Habit.**

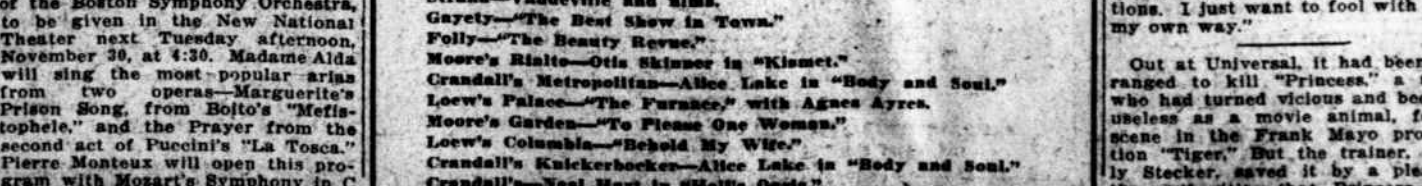
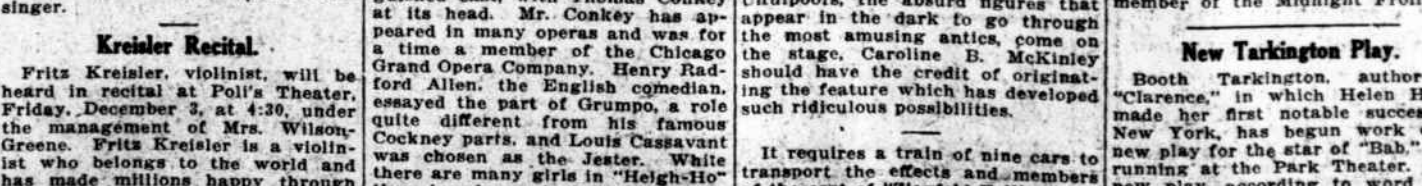
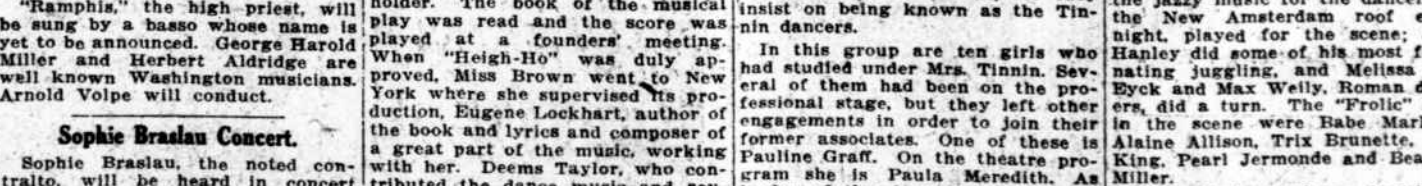
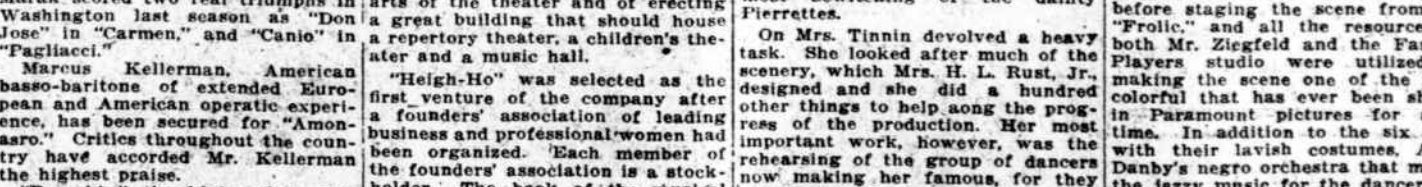
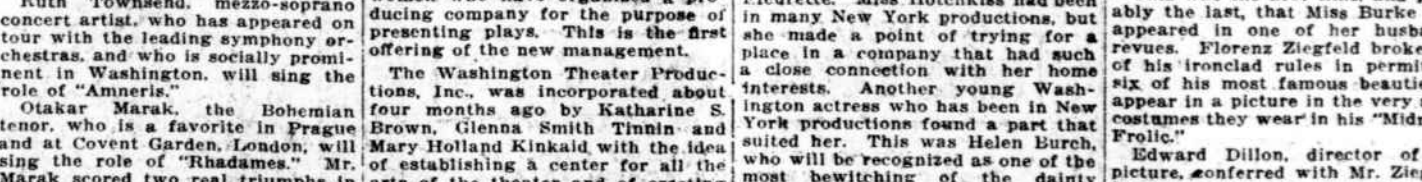
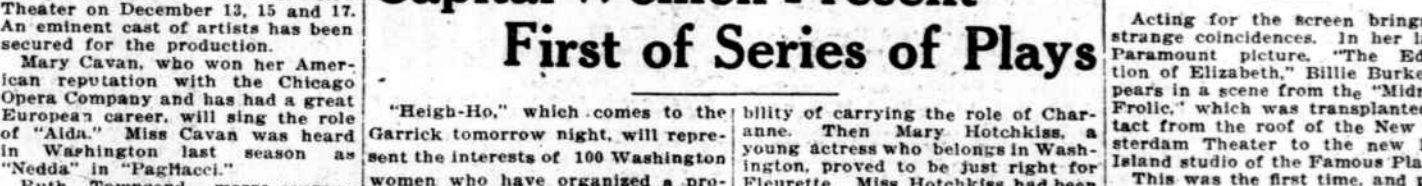
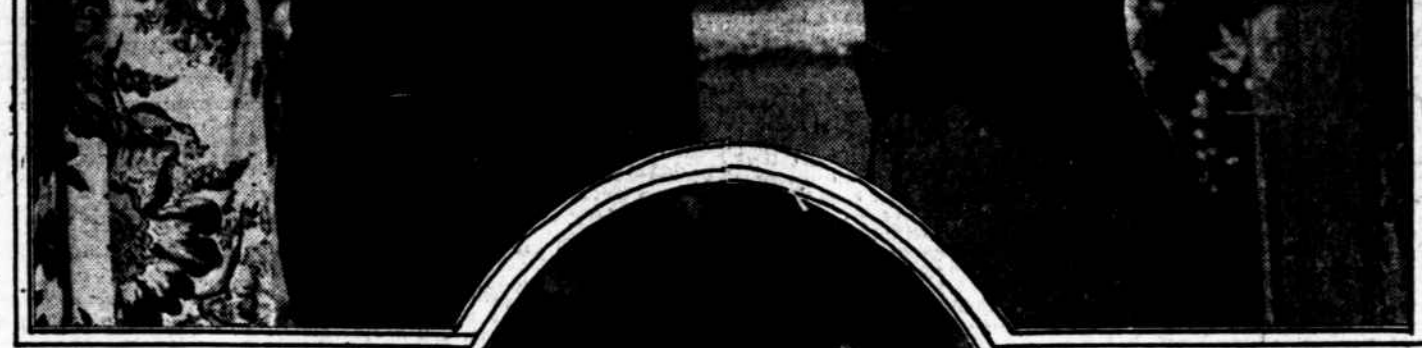
Prior to 1915, theater-going was hardly a habit with a large proportion of the American public. A salary that ranged from \$20 to \$35 a week admitted of comparatively few expenditures of \$4 for an evening in the theater. The picture got this vast majority of the population and the legitimate theater absorbed and educated, in leisurely fashion, the inevitable proportion of wage earners whose natural inclinations toward dramatic play brought them into their field of amusement.

Then came the war and wages swelled overnight. The bulk of these wage increases fell into the hands of those who previously had found neither funds nor inclination. Pushed toward the cash this class turned toward the theater in an irresistible inclination to rise superior to its former cultural estate. It was this class which packed the theaters whose natural inclinations toward dramatic play brought them into their field of amusement.

But, as was natural, a vast amount of dramatic education has been imparted in the last two or three years. A good many folks have had their eye-teeth and in the natural order of events they have ceased to marvel at dramatic form and have begun to study it.

The producers, so eager in their effort to pawn off such offerings as the picture, later dispose of to the picture-makers, are now facing the consequences of class education. The new generation of theatergoers who has opened its eyes and what it sees it wants no longer. A gradual though steady upward trend in the theater that is all ready noticeable in a mere three-month vista of the drama in a town of 400,000 is merely a reflex of this awakening.

If you doubt that such a transition in any given mass of people is possible in so short a time, consult the director of a band performing a neighborhood new to summer band concerts. He will tell you how short a time is required for the jazz requests to dwindle and the classic requests to fill his mail.

Only One Serious Drama  
Found in Week's ProgramMiller-Bates Co-Starring Piece Contrasts  
With Three Musical Plays.

The present week ushers in one of those ultra-jazz periods in the Washington theaters, when the serious drama is upheld by a single play and when all other legitimate stages are given over to seductive samples of the girl-and-music form of entertainment.

Henry Miller and Blanche Bates come to the National this week with their famous last-season hit in New York, "The Famous Mrs. Fair." This is the first opportunity Washingtonians have had to witness here a play which was regarded as one of the few really worth-while dramatic offerings of the past year. The presence of Henry Miller is a sufficient guarantee of the excellence of the cast and production.

The first offering of the Washington Theater Company, composed of Washington individuals interested in the production of plays, both musical and otherwise, will be seen at the Garrick in the form of a musical comedy, "Heigh-Ho." Irene, the Montgomery-Tierney-McCarthy musical hit of last year, comes to the Belasco for a return engagement, and "Betty Be Good," which made a week's appearance at the Garrick last season, also plays a return engagement at Poli's beginning Tuesday evening.

Variety programs of unusual merit will be found at B. F. Keith's and the Strand. The two burlesque theaters of the city—the Gayety and the Folly—announce productions of distinction for the week at hand.

Garrick.

"Heigh-Ho" comes to the Garrick tomorrow night, heralded as a musical offering. It is a love story with lyrics that afford Thomas Conkey, the featured singer, many opportunities to charm. "The Peacock Dance" and "The Dance of the Amazons" are announced as extraordinary numbers. The cast includes Fern Doubleday, Henry Radford Allen, Eugene Lockhart, and Virginia Hammond.

Folly.

At the Folly Theater today Jimmie Cooper and his "Beauty Revue" opens a week's engagement. Cooper, with Marty Collins and Eddie McCarthy, has a show that includes additionally Johnnie Bell, Chinese dancing comedian, and Bernie Green, Ada Lum, Rose Hemley and Princess Livingston. During the two acts, there is introduced a scene called "The Moving Picture Stars' Revue," a scene in a Turkish bath and a dramatic sensation, "The Penalty."

Belasco.

"Irene," the smart musical comedy, will be seen at the Belasco next week beginning tomorrow night. James Montgomery has provided a brilliant book, the score and lyrics are by Harry Tierney and Joseph McCarthy. The piece was staged by Edward Royce, of the Gayety Theater, London.

Gayety Star Began  
As Amateur Dancer  
On Gotham Streets

"All I want to do is to be able to amuse. I have no idea of uplifting."

"You were born in Greenwich Village," interrupted Frank Hunter's interviewer, in his dressing room at the Gayety Theater. "You were born in Greenwich Village and lived there many years. Your people were not connected with the stage. Your father was probably associated with some show. Your mother was a woman of deep religious convictions and could not tolerate the show business in any form. You—"

"Just a minute," broke in the comedian, when the interviewer paused for breath. "I want to—"

"You started as a lad to dance in the streets. The people then living in the vicinity of Greenwich Village—or Washington Square, as it has now become known—were Irish and Hebrews. They lived in great content and friendship and developed a community feeling. You danced in the streets and performed sidewalk acrobatics, and attracted the attention of Hassan Ben Ali or Edward Royce, of the Gayety Theater, some other distinguished person, who offered you a job to do that sort of thing professionally."

"Your dream has really come true, you thought, when your mother offered, and immediately in your imagination you saw yourself performing daring acrobatics and doing difficult dances before applauding multitudes."

"And Hassan Ben Ali took me to Omaha, where I got \$50 cents per week and my board and clothes—the promise of the clothes," declared Hunter, edging into the monologue at this point. "I learned a lot with Hassan—though I didn't get any clothes to speak of. I came back to New York and played Sunday shows."

"I came here to Washington five years ago with a Sunday program at the Gayety and Butch Cooper saw me and signed me immediately. That's all; good day."

## New Maughan Play.

A. H. Woods has received word from Somerset Maughan that the latter has completed a new play on Oriental life, to procure material for which Mr. Maughan went to China last year. The play will go into rehearsal in January.

Indian Actor's Face  
On Five-Cent Pieces

To have the picture of one of the leading actors in his latest production on the face of every 5-cent piece sent out by the United States Treasury is the fortune of Marshall Neilan, the popular director.

While the Neilan company was in Glacier Park, Montana, filming his battle scenes, he enlisted the aid of Two-Skin, White Caps, one of the most respected Indian citizens of Montana.

Ever long Neilan discovered that White Caps had a remarkable contour and decided to use him for some important "close-ups" in the picture. When the two had become better acquainted Neilan learned that it was White Caps who was chosen by the U. S. Treasury to pose for the Indian head which has been seen by all on our nickel.

Billie Burke  
In "Frolic"

Acting for the screen brings up strange coincidences. In her latest Paramount picture, "The Education of Elizabeth," Billie Burke appears in a scene from the "Midnight Frolic," which was transplanted in the New York production of the New Amsterdam Theater to the new London studio of the Famous Players.

This was the first time, and probably the last, that Miss Burke ever appeared in one of her husband's revues. Florence Ziegfeld broke one of his ironclad rules in permitting six of his most famous beauties to appear in a picture in the very same costumes they wear in his "Midnight Frolic."

Edward Dillon, director of the picture, conferred with Mr. Ziegfeld before staging the scene from the "Frolic," and all the resources of both Mr. Ziegfeld and the Famous Players studio were utilized in making the scene one of the most colorful that has ever been shown in Paramount pictures for some time. In addition to the six girls with their lavish costumes, A. S. Danby's negro orchestra that makes the jazz music for the dancers on the New Amsterdam roof every night, played for the scene; Jack Hanley did some of his most fascinating juggling, and Melissa Tenn Eyck and Max Welly, Roman dancers, did a turn. The "Frolic" girls in the scene were Babe Marlowe, Elaine Allison, Tris Brunette, Alta King, Pearl Jermonde and Beatrice Miller.

Miss Burke, whose legitimate stage career has been illustrious, never before has appeared as a chorus girl and her experience as a lady of the chorus in "The Education of Elizabeth" has been regarded by her as a lark. She has taken great delight in the interpretation of the character and the climax was reached when she was permitted to be a member of the Midnight Frolic.

## New Tarkington Play.

Booth Tarkington, author of "Clarence," in which Helen Hayes made her first notable success in New York, has begun work on a new play for the star of "Bab" now running at the Park Theater. The new play, according to word that has reached the office of George C. Tyler, will afford Miss Hayes an entirely different role from those in which she has appeared the last few seasons.

"The piece will have a part for her as different from Cora Wheeler in 'Clarence' as it is possible for me to make it," the Indiana novelist wrote. "I don't want any suggestions. I just want to fool with it in my own way."

Out at Universal, it had been arranged to kill "Princess," a tiger who had turned vicious and become useless as a movie animal, for a scene in the Frank Mayo production "Tiger." But the trainer, Curly Stecker, saved it by a plea to the authorities that Princess was a "friend of his."

## In the Pictures.

Upper Left—Georgiana Hewitt, who is one of the fair funmakers in "Betty Be Good," the sparkling musical comedy which begins a week's run at Poli's Tuesday evening.

Center—Henry Miller and Blanche Bates in the famous dramatic hit of last season, "The Famous Mrs. Fair," which begins a week's run at the National tomorrow night.

Upper Right—Fern Doubleday, one of the dainty characters in "Heigh-Ho," the new musical comedy which the Washington Theater Company will present at the Garrick for a week's engagement tomorrow night.

Lower—Dale Winter, who will be seen in the role of chief prominence in "Irene," the musical comedy success of last season, which begins a return engagement at the Belasco tomorrow night.

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To Sing 'Aida'  
Next MonthCapital Women Present  
First of Series of Plays

"Heigh-Ho," which comes to the Garrick tomorrow night, will represent the interests of 100 Washington women who have organized a producing company for the purpose of presenting plays. This is the first offering of the new management.

The Washington Theater productions, Inc., was incorporated about four months ago by Katharine S. Brown, Glenna Smith Tinnin and Mary Holland Kinkaid with the idea of establishing a center for all the arts of the theater and of erecting a great building that should house a repertory theater, a children's theater and a music hall.

"Heigh-Ho" was selected as the first venture of the company after a founders' association of leading business and professional women had been organized. Each member of the founders' association is a stockholder. The book of the musical play was read and the score was played at a founders' meeting.

When "Heigh-Ho" was duly approved, Miss Brown went to New York where she supervised its production. Eugene Lockhart, author of the book and lyrics and composer of a great part of the music, working with her. Deems Taylor, who contributed the dance music and several numbers, made the orchestration and then volunteered to act as musical director the first few weeks of the preliminary tour of "Heigh-Ho."

Miss Brown selected as director of production Ira Harde, one of the best New York producers, and they soon had in rehearsal a distinguished cast, with Thomas Conkey at its head. Mr. Conkey has appeared in many operas and was for a time a member of the Chicago Grand Opera Company. Henry Radford Allen, the English comedian, essayed the part of Grumpo, a role quite different from his famous Cockney parts, and Louis Cassavatt was chosen as the Jester. While there are many girls in "Heigh-Ho" there is only one important part, but on this one much depends. To Miss Fern Doubleday fell the responsibility of carrying the role of Charanne. Then Mary Hotchkiss, a young actress who belongs in Washington, proved to be just right for Fleurette. Miss Hotchkiss had been in many New York productions, but she made a point of trying for a place in a company that had such a close connection with her home interests. Another young Washington actress who has been in New York productions found a part that suited her. This was Helen Burch, who will be recognized as one of the most bewitching of the dainty "Frolics."

On Mrs. Tinnin devolved a heavy task. She looked after much of the scenery, which Mrs. H. L. Rust, Jr., designed and she did a hundred other things to help along the progress of the production. Her most important work, however, was the rehearsing of the group of dancers now making her famous, for they insist on being known as the Tinnin dancers.

In this group are ten girls who had studied under Mrs. Tinnin. Several of them had been on the professional stage, but they left other engagements in order to join their former associates. One of these is Pauline Graff. On the theatre program she is Paula Meredith. As leader of the Amazons she does a piece of work which brings her great applause every night and establishes her as an artist.

All who see "The Peacock Dance" and "The Dance of the Amazons" will feel an especial interest in the group of dancers, for they know that the dancers are college girls and daughters of well known families. And when the trifling, the absurd figures that appear in the dark to go through the most amusing antics, come on the stage, Caroline B. McKinley should have the credit of originating the feature which has developed such ridiculous possibilities.

It requires a train of nine cars to transport the effects and members of the cast of "Ziegfeld Follies." In all cases the organization moves in special trains.

## Today's Amusements.

B. F. Keith's—Vaudeville.  
Strand—Vaudeville and Glee.  
Gayety—"The Best Show in Town."  
Folly—"The Beauty Revue."  
Moore's Rialto—Otis Skinner in "Kismet."  
Crandall's Metropolitan—Alice Lake in "Body and Soul."  
Loew's Palace—"The Furber," with Agnes Ayres.  
Moore's Garden—"To Please One Woman."  
Loew's Columbia—"Behold My Wife."  
Crandall's Knickerbocker—Alice Lake in "Body and Soul."  
Crandall's—Neal Hart in "Hell's Odds."